



# Acinetobacter Infections

## Information for Servicemembers and their Families

A Collaborative Effort of DHSD, AFIOH, DHCC, NEHC, GEIS and USACHPPM

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### Summary of Key Messages

- *Acinetobacter* bacteria are common in the environment but are rarely a medical threat to healthy, uninjured persons.
- *Acinetobacter* can be acquired by person-to-person contact, through contact with contaminated surfaces, or as a result of wounds contaminated with dirt and debris.
- Some types of *Acinetobacter* are resistant to antibiotics and can be severe and especially difficult to treat if they result in bloodstream infections.
- Persons most at risk of difficult-to-treat *Acinetobacter* infections are those who are very ill, have traumatic wounds, and are treated in intensive care units.
- Frequent hand washing and disinfection of medical treatment facilities are the best ways to avoid spreading *Acinetobacter*.

### What is *Acinetobacter*?

*Acinetobacter* (a-sin-EE-toe-back-ter) is a common type of bacteria found in many places in the environment, including water, soil, and sewage. There are at least 25 different types of *Acinetobacter*. *Acinetobacter baumannii* is the particular type that is often associated with hospital-acquired infections. There is no evidence that our adversaries are using *Acinetobacter* as a biological warfare agent.

### How do you get *Acinetobacter* infections?

Wounds can be contaminated with dirt and debris containing *Acinetobacter* bacteria at the time of injury. *Acinetobacter* can also spread by person-to-person contact and contact with contaminated surfaces in intensive care units and other healthcare settings. Other possible sources of infection are being investigated, and any new information on prevention will be communicated when it becomes available.

### What types of infections does *Acinetobacter* cause?

Infections caused by *Acinetobacter* in the general population are very rare. *Acinetobacter* can cause pneumonia, skin and wound infections, urinary tract infection blood infections. Bloodstream infections caused by *Acinetobacter baumannii* tend to be the most severe

### What are the symptoms of an *Acinetobacter* infection?

Symptoms will vary depending on the specific part of the body that is affected. Symptoms of pneumonia, for instance, could include fever, chills, cough, and shortness of breath. A wound infection might cause fever and redness, increasing pain, and pus around the wound. Persons with these symptoms should see their health care providers.

### How are *Acinetobacter* infections treated?

Most types of *Acinetobacter* are easily treated with common antibiotics and with other supportive care. Other types of *Acinetobacter*, and especially those acquired in hospitals, can be resistant to many commonly prescribed antibiotics and require special treatments. Health care providers identify treatment options for each infection on an individual basis.

### How many severe *Acinetobacter* infections have affected U.S. Servicemen and women?

As of mid-November, 2004, approximately 85 patients who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have been identified with *Acinetobacter* bloodstream infections. Our military treatment facilities have raised the level of awareness among their staffs to ensure that any new infections are promptly identified and treated.



**What is being done to prevent *Acinetobacter* infection or to ensure early treatment in wounded personnel?**

Medical personnel from all branches of the military are working together and with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify causes and sources of *Acinetobacter* infection and to prevent future infections.

Isolation and infection control procedures such as hand washing and wearing of gowns and gloves by those who have contact with infected patients are used to prevent transmission to others in our medical treatment facilities.

Military medical staffs know that the numbers of *Acinetobacter* infections increase in battlefield situations because of the types of traumatic injuries service-members suffer. Because of this, they are paying increased attention to infection control procedures and have been told to watch carefully for early signs of infection.

**What precautions should hospital visitors take against *Acinetobacter*?**

Visitors should ask the medical staff about precautions before visiting patients.

Visitors coming into contact with *Acinetobacter*-infected patients should wash their hands thoroughly before entering and leaving the room to avoid spreading germs. Normal warm or hot water wash cycles on a home clothes washer should eliminate these germs from clothing. Medical staffs will provide specific instructions if additional precautions are necessary.

**Should people with weakened immune systems visit someone with an *Acinetobacter* infection?**

People with weakened immune systems should consult their health care provider and the hospital's infection control staff before visiting someone with *Acinetobacter* or any other serious infection. Such precautions apply especially to people with organ transplants, cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and people with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

**What happens when an *Acinetobacter*-infected patient returns home?**

Proper hand washing and keeping any open wounds cleaned and dressed may be all that is required for *Acinetobacter* patients as precautions against spreading infections upon returning home. Medical staffs will provide specific instructions if additional precautions are necessary.

**Where can I get more information?**

**Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)**

Phone: 1-888-232-ESOH (3764)  
<http://starview.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>  
General medical information: 210-536-1788

**DOD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)**

Phone: 866-559-1627  
<http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

**DOD Deployment Health Support Directorate (DHSD)**

Phone: 800-497-6261  
[http://www.deploymentlink.osd.mil/contact\\_us/mail\\_form.shtml](http://www.deploymentlink.osd.mil/contact_us/mail_form.shtml)

**DOD Global Emerging Infections Surveillance and Response System (GEIS)**

Phone: 301-319-9072  
<http://www.geis.fhp.osd.mil>

**Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)**

Phone: 757-953-0700  
<http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>

**U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)**

Phone: 1-800-222-9698  
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/acin\\_general.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/acin_general.htm)

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<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5345a1.htm>

